

**Agenda Item: 9**

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**Meeting:** Executive

**Date:** 12 May 2009

**Subject:** School Admissions Forum - Membership

**Report of:** Portfolio Holder for Children, Families and Learning

**Summary:** The report proposes amendments to the membership of the Admissions Forum that was agreed by Shadow Executive on 28 October 2008, following new regulations and a new School Admissions Code which came into force in February 2009.

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**Advising Officer:** Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children, Families and Learning

**Contact Officer:** Rob Mills, Committee Services Manager

**Public/Exempt:** Public

**Wards Affected:** All

**Function of:** Executive

**Key Decision** No

**Reason for urgency/  
exemption from call-in** Not applicable

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 1. That amended terms of reference be approved for the Admissions Forum as set out at Appendix A to the report, including a revised membership and role, in compliance with the new regulations and Admissions Code.**
- 2. That the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder and the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children, Families and Learning, be given delegated power to approve any future minor amendments to the Admissions Forum's membership arrangements where these have been recommended by the Forum itself.**

**Reason for Recommendations:** *So that the terms of reference of the Admissions Forum comply with the revised membership requirements in the new regulations and Code.*

## **The Forum's Terms of Reference**

1. The Shadow Executive on 28 October 2008 approved transitional arrangements for schools admissions including the immediate establishment of a Central Bedfordshire Admissions Forum to discuss and monitor the effectiveness of local admissions policies and arrangements and ensure fairness and compliance with the then Admissions Code. Shadow Executive approved the Forum's terms of reference including its membership.
2. The Forum was established in November 2008 and has since met twice in December and March to consider admissions arrangements for September 2009 and September 2010.
3. The present terms of reference provide for a core membership of up to 20 members as determined by the regulations in force at the time, comprising the Portfolio Holder for Children, Families and Learning; head teachers of community and voluntary controlled and foundation/trust schools in all three phases (lower, middle and upper) and voluntary aided lower schools; representatives of the Church of England and Roman Catholic Church, parent governor(s); and community representatives. Other maintained schools could become members but not core members, as could other persons recommended by the core members and accepted by the local authority.

## **New Regulations and Admissions Code**

4. New regulations and a new Admissions Code were issued in December 2008 and came into force on 10 February 2009. They made minor amendments to the criteria for membership of Admission Forums, aiming to make them more representative of parents and the local area.
5. The membership changes were principally that:
  - (a) voluntary controlled (VC) schools are now a separate category from community schools;
  - (b) only one representative may now be appointed for each religious denomination which has designated religious schools;
  - (c) parent governors are replaced by parent representatives who must be a resident in the area and the parent of a child who is of compulsory school age or who has attained the age of two and is receiving primary education;
  - (d) local employers, the armed forces and other bodies may be represented; and
  - (e) the wider membership available to 'non-core' school members has been withdrawn to make Forums smaller and more manageable.

6. It is expected that Forums will consist of a spread of members who have a genuine interest in admission arrangements, represent the interests of the local area and are not dominated by any one group.
7. Some of these changes were anticipated in the report to Shadow Executive in October 2008 but a few further changes are now required. The Central Bedfordshire Forum also has vacancies in 5 of the 20 places to be filled under the existing terms of reference and the opportunity can be taken to amend some of the criteria where it has not been possible to recruit.

### **Proposed Membership Changes**

8. The Admissions Forum has considered the changes that are needed and has recommended the Executive to amend the present terms of reference as follows:
  - (a) the vacancy for one lower school head teacher representing foundation and trust schools to be made available in future to a governor or head teacher of any lower school in Central Bedfordshire;
  - (b) the existing place for a Church of England middle school head teacher to become a representative of voluntary aided middle schools, and the vacancy for one Church of England upper school head teacher to be removed as they both exceed the revised requirement for only one nominee from each religious denomination;
  - (c) two new voluntary controlled school representatives (governors or head teachers) to be recruited;
  - (d) a representative of All Saints Academy, Dunstable to be appointed in advance of its opening in September 2009; and
  - (e) a second parent representative to be recruited in addition to the existing parent governor (who meets the revised criteria for a parent representative).

### **Revised Role and Responsibilities**

9. The new regulations also made minor changes to the role and responsibilities of Admissions Forums, requiring them to consider the fairness rather than the legality of admissions arrangements and ensuring they have an ongoing role as consultees in admission arrangements.
10. They also provide for Forums to produce a voluntary annual report on how admission arrangements in their area contribute to fair access, which can accompany the local authority's own annual report which is now statutory. It is also expected that Forums will be involved in the production of the local authority's report. The Central Bedfordshire Admissions Forum has decided to provide input to the local authority's own statutory annual report, rather than to produce a separate report of its own.

## Revised Terms of Reference

11. The Executive is asked to approve the revised terms of reference for the Forum set out at Appendix A, which meet the criteria in the new regulations and Code of Practice. Democratic Services will then seek to recruit to the new positions at the earliest opportunity. The membership can be approved now and will not be affected by the election of a new Council in June.
12. To avoid the need for the Executive itself to approve any further minor amendments that may be required in the Forum's membership arrangements (e.g. arising from future statutory amendments or from difficulties in recruiting members under certain categories), the Executive is asked to consider delegating this function to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder and the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children, Families and Learning, in cases where the Admissions Forum has itself recommended the amendment.

### **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Council Priorities:**

As well as meeting statutory requirements, a properly constituted and effective Admissions Forum strengthens partnership working and helps develop a "customer first" culture by directly involving schools, parents and other community representatives as consultees on the Council's admission arrangements.

#### **Financial:**

There are no financial implications.

#### **Legal:**

The proposals in this report comply with the School Admissions (Local Authority Reports and Admissions Forums) (England) Regulations 2008 (S.I. 2008/3091) and the Schools Admissions Code issued under Section 85 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

#### **Risk Management:**

There are no risk management implications.

#### **Staffing (including Trades Unions):**

None.

#### **Equalities/Human Rights:**

None.

**Community Safety:**

None.

**Sustainability:**

None.

**Appendices:**

Appendix A – Central Bedfordshire Admissions Forum: Terms of Reference (May 2009)

**Background Papers** (open to public inspection):

Report to Admissions Forum 24 March 2009, agenda item 3.

Location of papers: Priory House, Chicksands